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SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/IHB
STATE PASS USTR JANE DOHERTY
STATE PASS USAID
STATE PASS HHS/NIH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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PINR, AMGT, TF, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIUM ESTIMATES 900 NEW CASES OF H1N1; VACCINE TESTS
BEGIN

SUMMARY

1. (U) Belgian health authorities announced on August 7 an estimated 900 new cases of H1N1 in Belgium for the first week of August. The weekly estimate indicates the virus is spreading at predicted levels. Belgian media report that tests of H1N1 vaccines have begun on volunteers at several Belgian universities. In a press release on August 6, the Belgian Influenza Commission reminded the public that the distribution of antiviral medication is following the planned procedure and that drugs will remain freely available for patients of at-risk groups. End summary.

H1N1 AT NORMAL LEVELS -- GOVERNMENT

2. (U) The Belgian Influenza Commission estimates that some 900 new cases of H1N1 were registered in Belgium during the first week of August. The estimate is based on information collected voluntarily by a network of 180 General Practitioners (GPs) whose patients comprise a representative sample of the Belgian population. In Belgium the incidence of the flu is still at normal levels for this time of the year and the information collected by the network of GPs indicates that the virus is spreading at a rate similar to weeks previous and not yet increasing.

FIRST TESTS OF H1N1 VACCINES

3. (U) Belgian press reported on August 10 that vaccines against H1N1 are being tested for the first time in hospitals in Antwerp and Ghent on some 600 healthy volunteers. The test vaccines developed by Novartis will contain different doses of the influenza virus so that researchers can determine the most effective composition. Belgian newspapers report that the first vaccines against H1N1 should be on the market in Belgium in October if everything goes according to plan.

DISTRIBUTION OF ANTIVIRALS GOING AS PLANNED

4. (U) In an August 6 press release the Belgian Influenza Commission reminded the Belgian public and GPs that the distribution of antiviral medication continues to follow the planned procedure: a GP who determines that a patient belongs to a known risk group and would therefore benefit from a treatment of antiviral medication can obtain the necessary drugs through municipal medical inspectors. Antiviral medication continues to be free for all at-risk patients in Belgium.

